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## Study Overview: California's Court Interpreter Certification and Registration Testing Program

(September 2006)

State law (Gov. Code, §§ 68560–68566) charges the Judicial Council with responsibility for adopting programs and standards to ensure that qualified interpreters are provided in the courts. This responsibility includes the adoption of standards for testing and certifying or registering court interpreters. It is incumbent on the council to review these testing standards and methods regularly to make sure that they reflect developments in professional practice as well as the evolving needs of the public.

The last study of California's testing program for certifying and registering court interpreters was conducted over 12 years ago, in 1994. Therefore, the council has initiated a new study of the testing procedures and instruments. The study will cover spoken languages, but not sign language.

A national firm, ALTA Language Services, Inc., has been selected through a competitive bidding process to conduct this study. ALTA Language Services has a 25-year history in language services, and over 10 years in language testing. It is an approved testing organization of the U.S. Government, and is the sole language-testing provider for both the City of Los Angeles and the State of Arizona.

The study will consist of a number of components. The first will be confidential telephone interviews with a random, representative sample of currently certified or registered California court interpreters, including both staff and independent contractors. All designated languages will be represented, as well as several high-demand, nondesignated languages. The participating court interpreters will be interviewed on their own time, for which they will be reimbursed by the consultant at the standard half-day court interpreter rate of \$147. The purpose of these interviews is to determine the core skills, knowledge, and abilities practicing court interpreters believe are needed to perform the function of court interpreting. Neither the AOC nor any individual court will know which court interpreters have been selected, have participated, or have been compensated for their participation.

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Another component of the study will involve confidential interviews or focus groups with other stakeholder groups, including judicial officers, court staff, and labor representatives. The purpose will be to gather input regarding their perspectives on the testing program for court interpreting.

The test instruments and procedures will then be reviewed to determine the degree to which they align with the needs and concerns identified by the study participants.

The study will also include a confidential written survey provided to all certified and registered California court interpreters. Its purpose will be to create a profile of the current labor pool so as to target future recruitment and training efforts to fill any identifiable gaps. The consultant will provide this data to the council and the Administrative Office of the Courts in summary form only; individual interpreter identities and responses will be known only to the consultant.

The study is expected to take approximately one year. The final results of the study, along with the consultant's recommendations, will be available by October 2007. The council will then consider the recommendations with the advice of its Court Interpreters Advisory Panel; and with the advice of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Language Access in the Courts, proposed by Assembly Member Chu as AB 2227, should that measure become law. Based on the council's direction, the Administrative Office of the Courts will then address any needed development of revised testing instruments and procedures.

Any new test instruments or procedures that are developed will be put in place by fall 2008. Until that time, the current tests and testing procedures will remain in use.

*Contact:*

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*Additional resources:*

Court Interpreters Program Web site, [www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/courtinterpreters](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/courtinterpreters)